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Southern (Over) Exposure? Quebec and the Evolution of Canada's Grand Strategy, 2002–2012

David G. Haglund^a and Justin Massie^b

^aDepartment of Political Studies, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada; ^bDépartement de science politique, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montreal, QC, Canada

ABSTRACT

One of the most persistent themes in the debate on Canadian foreign policy over the past few decades concerns the influence Quebec is thought to possess over the design and implementation of Canadian foreign and defense policy. Our purpose in this article is to situate this general debate within a more specific context, of Canada's grand strategic choices as they principally involve the country's security and defense relations with the US. To do this, we adopt somewhat of a "counterfactual" tack; to wit, we inquire whether, in the absence of Quebec from the Canadian confederation, we should expect to have seen a fundamentally different grand strategy fashioned by Ottawa, one with different significance for relations with the US. We focus on two specific cases, both of which have figured prominently in recent Canadian–American strategic relations: the war in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq. We conclude that while there is something to the claim that Quebec can and does boast of a certain "specificity" in the matter of Canada's grand-strategic preferences, it is hardly the same thing as arguing that the country without Quebec would have adopted policies on both Afghanistan and Iraq that were fundamentally different from the ones it chose to follow.

KEYWORDS

Quebec; grand strategy; Iraq; Afghanistan; public opinion; Canadian foreign policy

Introduction

One of the most persistent themes in the debate on Canadian foreign policy over the past few decades concerns the influence Quebec is thought to possess over the design and implementation of Ottawa's "grand strategy."¹ Two aspects of this debate stand out: the first is empirical, and the second normative. How much influence does Quebec wield over Canadian grand strategy? And is its influence (however measured) a good or bad thing for Canada as a whole? The two questions, it has to be said, are not always easily disentangled, the one from the other, and many analysts who broach the topic conflate them. For instance, historian Jack Granatstein (2007, 148–50) argues that, ever since the time of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Canada's foreign and security policies have been primarily fashioned according to the preferences of French Canada (taken here as surrogate for Quebec). To Granatstein, this has definitely *not* been a good thing, because ethnocultural minorities should never, in a democracy, be allowed to play an outsized role in the

articulation and promotion of the “national” interest. “[I]f ... it is bad policy to let Canadian Jews or Canadian Muslims have undue influence on Canada’s policy to Israel, for example, it is similarly bad policy to let French Canada determine Canadian foreign and defence policy.”

To this manner of framing the question, Quebec sovereigntists reply that nothing could be further from the truth. To them, the shaping of Canadian grand strategy has all along been an enterprise that fundamentally contradicts and challenges the values and interests of the Quebec “nation.” Consider the 2011 electoral platform of the Parti Québécois, with its insistence that for more than 40 years, the federal government has been systematically undercutting Quebec on the international stage, handicapping its ability to defend core principles. “The most important foreign policy decisions, such as the military engagement in Afghanistan or the Canadian position on climate change, have been taken by Ottawa, and far too often in contradiction of the interests and values of Quebec” (Parti Québécois 2011, 45). On her first visit to Paris, newly elected Premier Pauline Marois cut to the chase by remarking that the foreign policy of the Harper government did not, in any way, shape, or form, correspond with the values and the interests of Quebecers, who she said simply could not recognize themselves in current policy, which she denounced for having turned its back on the country’s traditional openness and multilateralism (Chouinard 2012, A16).

So, who has a better grasp of reality? Is it those who argue Quebec has a disproportionate impact upon Canadian grand strategy? Or is it those who see that strategy as reflecting nearly exclusively the preferences of the English–Canadian majority? Our purpose in this article is to situate this general debate within a more specific context, of Canada’s grand strategic choices as they principally involve the country’s security and defense relations with the US, or what we might call Canada’s “America policy.” To do this, we are going to adopt somewhat of a “counterfactual” tack; to wit, we are going to inquire whether, in the absence of Quebec from the Canadian confederation, we should expect to have seen a fundamentally different grand strategy get fashioned by Ottawa, one with different significance for relations with the US. Our counterfactual focus will be on two specific cases, both of which have figured prominently in recent Canadian–American strategic relations: the war in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq. In each case, Quebecers have been depicted as being fundamentally out of step not only with their American neighbors, but also with their Canadian fellow citizens living in the so-called “rest of Canada” (the ROC). As we noted earlier, the empirical and normative dimensions of our topic tend to be conflated, such that some analysts have ended up condemning Quebec for leading Canada along a ruinous path, while others have applauded it for saving the country from a fate worse than death!

Our focus in this article will be to concentrate our attention on the empirical realities. In what follows, therefore, we will seek to shine a spotlight into the empirical duskiess, employing counterfactual reasoning to help us arrive at some understanding as to whether Canadian grand strategy would have been much different in the absence of Quebec than it has been with the province as a part of the federation. We divide the analysis in two parts. The first of these assesses the nature and scope of the allegedly “distinct” set of foreign policy attitudes said to characterize Quebecers but not their fellow citizens in the ROC, with particular reference to our two cases studies of Afghanistan and Iraq. The second part of our analysis addresses two means by which

it is claimed Quebec influences Canada's overall policy stances: (1) its direct political representation at the federal level and (2) its ability to exploit to its advantage concerns over "national unity." Again, we place these vectors of influence within the context of our pair of case studies. To get slightly ahead of our story, we will conclude that while there *is* something to the claim that Quebec can and does boast of a certain "specificity" in the matter of Canada's grand-strategic preferences, it is hardly the same thing as arguing that the country without Quebec would have adopted policies on both Afghanistan and Iraq that were fundamentally different from the ones it chose to follow, or that its "America policy" would itself have taken shape differently.

Differential threat perception?

The perception of a clear and present threat to the interests and values of a society constitutes, according to one body of international relations theory, one of the most powerful motivating forces for decision-making (Ripsman 2005, 669–94). Yet when a state happens to be fragmented on the societal level—by which we mean that it is characterized by deep fissures regarding the "national identity" (due, for instance, to national minorities)—it becomes incredibly difficult for policymakers to adopt those responses most suited to addressing the problem before them. In principle, a clear perception of threat should impel a similarly clear understanding of the optimal response thereto, as well as foment political cohesion (the so-called "rally-'round-the-flag" effect). But the principle does not necessarily apply in the case of fragmented societies. In these latter, differences in ethnocultural identity can and do result in differences in the manner in which threat is both perceived and responded to. A group that feels itself excluded or even different from the state will become a group that, perforce, can often find it very hard to rally 'round the flag. As explained by Schweller (2004), two likely consequences might unfold in such a case: "First, the deeper the divisions within society prior to the threat, the more likely a part of the community will either actively collaborate with the enemy or remain passive rather than resist the aggressor. Second, the deeper the social divisions within the state, the greater the resistance to military mobilization against the threat" (also see Wendt 1994, 390).

In the case of Canada, the country's multinational character—notably the existence of two national cultures (some say more²)—has meant that when it comes to threat-perceiving, Quebecers and Anglo-Canadians are often not on the same page. It is said, moreover, that Quebec's nationalism accounts for whatever inclinations toward pacifism, anti-militarism, anti-imperialism, and isolationism—to say nothing, even, of anti-Americanism—can be detected within Canada's grand strategy.³ For Adams (2004, 765–95), the emergence of the Quebec "difference," whatever that might entail, stems from the indelible impression upon the collective imaginary of being a subjugated people—a "small nation"—forever struggling to survive. Still others argue that the attitudinal predispositions of Quebecers must be traced back to the cultural and ancestral bonds linking them with their former "kin country," France (De Rivet 2003, 117–20; Monière 2004). Here, what is being advanced is the claim that Quebecers' values are more closely aligned with European than with American ones, and this is what distances them from the "Anglo-Saxon" countries—these latter increasingly said to constitute an "Anglosphere," a transnational civilization entity based upon linguistic

commonalities, as well as political (viz., liberalism) ones, and say some, even strategic ones (viz., a propensity to utilize, or at least not shy away from, the application of military force) (Vucetic 2011; Haglund 2005, 179–98). Yet another explanation is offered by those who hold that it is Quebecers' religious traditions and sense of civic responsibility that account for their differing views on matters of strategy (Gow 1970, 8–122). Finally, the historical dimension is invoked, with some analysts remarking on the consistency with which Quebecers refused to flock to the colors on behalf of causes earlier associated with British imperialism—a consistency, they say, that has given rise to the society's culture of pacifism (Mongeau 1993, 81–9; Robitaille 2007, 1–5; Roussel and Boucher 2008).

Now, it really is not necessary for us to establish the precise “cause(s)” of Quebecers' orientations toward matters relating to war and peace in order to be able to assess the relevance of the main contention under examination, namely that Quebecers *do* demonstrate greater passivity in respect of external threats than other Canadians. On this latter point, all that needs to be done is to canvas the historical record regarding the so-called “specificity” of Quebec. We need to have this record speak to the existence of a “distinct society,” otherwise the counterfactual approach we propose to undertake here collapses under the weight of its internal contradictions, for if Quebec cannot be argued to be different from the ROC in important ways, of what value would be the counterfactual test? So we will accept the existence of difference, even if we exempt ourselves from the chore of having to “explain” it. To determine whether the difference has, in effect, “made a difference” is really what we are about in these pages, and in pursuit of our goal, we are going in the next two sections of the article to examine more closely at Canadian public opinion on, respectively, the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Quebeckers' views of the war in Afghanistan

The terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington on 9/11 sent shockwaves through Quebec, as they did through the rest of Canada, triggering an outpouring of solidarity everywhere in the country. At a ceremony commemorating the 10th anniversary of the attacks, an emotional Jean Charest summed up the attitudes of the province he led: “For the first time, terror—something we had grown used to happening somewhere else—had arrived almost in our own midst. It hit our neighbors, our friends.” The premier stressed the immediacy of the cooperation that ensued between Quebec and American authorities, testifying to the bonds of friendship and trust between neighbors. “When our neighbours needed our help,” he recalled, “we were there to give it, just as they would have done, for us” (Presse canadienne 2011). In a similar vein, Charest's predecessor as Quebec premier, Bernard Landry, advocated in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 the adoption of “common protocols, accords, and standards” with Washington, on matters related to public security, with the view to hastening the arrival of a continental “security perimeter” (Dutrisac 2001, A5).

Such enthusiasm proved short-lived, and would soon be supplanted by a new mood, of mistrust and even reprehension. In the weeks following 9/11, Quebecers in particular would reveal themselves to be among the sharpest critics of American foreign policy anywhere in the world. The most notable example of this mind-set became manifest subsequent to the military action begun in October, to topple a Taliban regime in

Afghanistan that had been harboring al-Qaeda, whose leader Osama bin Laden had been only too happy to claim responsibility for planning and carrying out the attacks of early September. Although Canada was one of the first countries to become engaged in the military response (deploying naval and air assets, as well as special forces), its participation in the American campaign to unseat the Taliban was not well-regarded in Quebec (Léger Marketing 2001), where it garnered the support of only 36 percent of the public, as opposed to 57 percent in the ROC who favored the deployment. One Quebec editorialist was moved to remark in early October that the province was in the throes of an “irrepressible current of anti-American hatred,” for which one would have to go back to the 1930s to find anything comparable (Roy 2001, A18).

This editorialist to the contrary notwithstanding, Quebecers’ attitudes toward the war in Afghanistan should not be taken as a gauge of anti-Americanism, unless one is prepared to make some qualifications regarding the definition of that contested term⁴—a task we set for ourselves later in this chapter. For the moment, let us consider the evidence in Figure 1, which charts the evolution of Canadian support of the Afghan combat mission, differentiating the respondents in terms of their province of residence (Quebec, Alberta, and elsewhere, i.e., the ROC). This differentiation was justified on the logic that the two specified provinces represented the attitudinal poles in matters related to international security, each setting itself apart from the undifferentiated eight other provinces (Massie 2008b).

The data illustrate three compelling findings. First, if Quebecers’ attitudes really were a reflection of anti-Americanism, then it was a strange kind of anti-Americanism, since a majority of the province actually supported (wholly or somewhat) the Canadian military effort in Afghanistan in 2001 and 2002. Moreover, even if it is true that Quebecers evinced some ambivalence about going to war against the Taliban in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, three-quarters of them continued nonetheless to favor harmonizing Canadian anti-terrorist measures with those being elaborated in the US (Compas 2001). This latter finding corresponds with the province’s typically “pro-American” attitudes as those had been on display during the 1980s and 1990s, nowhere more so than on matters related to trade and the economy (Chodos and Hamovitch 1991; Gidengil et al. 2004, 345–67; Haglund and Massie 2009, 403). A glance at history suggests what has

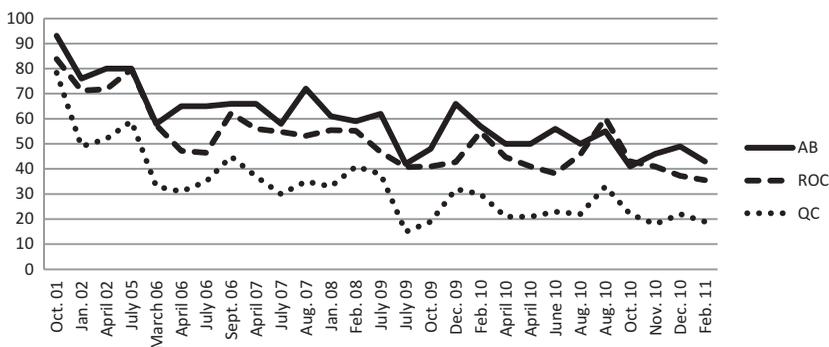


Figure 1. Support for the Canadian combat mission in Afghanistan. Source: Compilation by authors.

really characterized Quebecers' attitudes toward the US, namely a cyclical pattern of "pro-American" followed by "anti-American" phases and so on—a cycle, in other words, that yields the obvious conclusion: they have historically been, as Yvan Lamonde (1995, 15–60) puts it, "ambivalent" about their neighbors to the south (also see Lanctot 1967; Bouchard 1995, 2008; Balthazar and Hero 1999; Harvey 2005).

The second finding that the data in Figure 1 illustrate is how suddenly Quebec (and to a lesser extent Alberta and the ROC) support for the Afghan war declined, at three different junctures: winter 2002, spring 2006, and summer 2009. What this suggests is that the attitudes of Canadians were evolving in parallel in the face of external constraints, such that factors other than anti-Americanism can account for the growing disenchantment with the counterinsurgency. Many hypotheses have been advanced to explain this, ranging from the so-called "Trenton effect" (i.e., the aversion to casualties, named after the Canadian Forces (CF) base in Ontario at which the bodies of fallen soldiers are received on their return to Canada), traditional Quebec anti-militarism and anti-imperialism, confusion over war aims, or simply just a general sense of fatigue with a conflict increasingly judged to be unwinnable (Massie 2009, 911–37; Fletcher, Bastedo, and Hove 2009; Boucher 2010, 237–58).

Third, and most important for our purposes, Figure 1 illustrates that evolving Canadian assessment of the war in Afghanistan reveals a fairly significant gap separating Quebecers' opinions from those of other Canadians, and in particular from Albertans. During the period under examination here, which is from October 2001 to February 2011, an average gap of 27 points separated Quebecers from Albertans, with 19 points separating them from the ROC minus Alberta (this latter cluster itself being separated by 9 points from attitudes in Alberta). There can be absolutely no doubt about a Quebec "specificity" regarding the question of war and peace.

This distinctiveness constitutes a major worry for Canadian policymakers, forced as they are to have to take into consideration such radically divergent opinions appertaining to international security. Thus what Randall Schweller suggests in fragmented societies is indeed what has happened in Canada, where different cultural groupings end up perceiving threat in different ways. For instance, while only one Quebecer in two supported Canada's participating in 2002's "Operation Enduring Freedom," which aimed at eradicating al-Qaeda and its Taliban supporters in the Kandahar region, in Alberta 71 percent favored the mission, while in the ROC minus Alberta, 71 percent did. Similarly, between 2006 and 2011, only around 28 percent of Quebecers thought Canada's continued participation in the war made sense, as opposed to 56 percent of Albertans and 48 percent in the ROC minus Alberta. This skepticism regarding the merits of the Canadian war effort corresponds with a long-standing pattern of Quebec's cutting for itself a distinctive figure in matters related to international security.

Surveyed following the terrorist attacks on the London public transit system in July 2005, only 45 percent of Quebecers believed that it was just a matter of time before Canada itself would become the target of terrorist bombs; in Alberta 75 percent were of this view, and in the ROC minus Alberta, 68 percent (Ipsos News Center, 2005). The evidence, then, would appear to support the validity of a counterfactual hypothesis, contending that Canadian foreign policy (and by extension, grand strategy) would indeed have been different in the absence of Quebec from the federation. After 2002, there would never recur a time when a majority of Quebecers supported Canada's

participation in combat operations in Afghanistan—the support shown in 2005 was for a different deployment, peacekeeping in Kabul—whereas outside of Quebec majorities did support the combat mission from the autumn of 2006 to the winter of 2008, and then again between February and August 2010. In sum, by simply confining our inquiry to the level of public opinion and going no further, it is hard to see how, in the absence of Quebec from the federation, Canadian policies related to international security could have remained identical to those adopted with Quebec a part of Canada. Let us now turn to our second case study, the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Quebeckers and the invasion of Iraq

Quebeckers again stood out from their fellow Canadians in responding to the attack on Iraq launched by the US and UK in March 2003, and would do so in a way that mirrored their response to Canada's Afghanistan policy over the period we covered in the preceding section of this article. Figure 2 illustrates the evolution in Canadian attitudes toward the use of force in Iraq between 2002 and 2004, both before and after the toppling of the Saddam Hussein regime.

Once again, Canadian opinion would fluctuate in response to external stimuli, but at all times between September 2002 and April 2003, save *once*, those attitudinal shifts would run along parallel tracks, with the direction of change in Quebec mirroring that in the ROC (above, we have split the data for some months into three roughly equal parts, viz. for February and March 2003). That one exceptional moment, when the curve for Quebec deviated from that of the ROC, came in the immediate aftermath of Jean Chrétien's announcement that Canada would not take part in combat operations against Saddam Hussein's regime.

The first significant decline in support for military action against Iraq, shown in Figure 2, appeared following the release on December 20, 2002, of a report by Hans Blix, who headed the UN's arms inspectors in Iraq. In this report, Blix criticized both the US and UK for not providing evidence sufficient to substantiate their claim that Iraq continued to possess arsenals of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). After this,

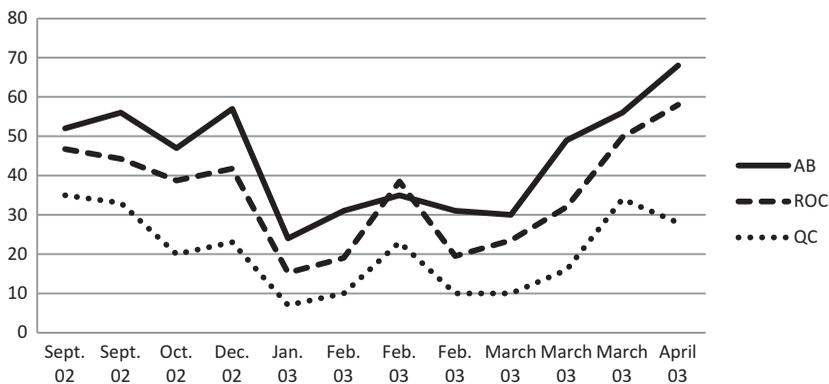


Figure 2. Support for Canadian participation in the Iraq War.

however, Canadian support for military action would once more rise, notwithstanding (or perhaps *because of*) Ottawa's decision to deploy nearly 2,000 soldiers to Afghanistan—a decision that would have led attentive observers to conclude that the country had no troops to spare for combat in Iraq. Thus, Canadians could have supported, in theory, participation in a war in which, in practice, it would have been impossible for their soldiers to partake. This rise in support for an Iraq campaign occurred even though it was growing extremely likely that France or Russia, or both, would use Security Council vetoes to block any UN endorsement of an attack. It should be recalled that Prime Minister Chrétien had consistently maintained throughout the crisis months of late 2002 and early 2003 that any Canadian participation in the war would be contingent upon the Security Council's authorization, after the pattern established with the Persian Gulf war more than a decade earlier (though *not*, we hasten to add, the model followed for the Kosovo war in 1999) (Massie and Roussel 2005, 69–87).

Figure 2 shows that immediately after Ottawa announced it would not take part in the military campaign against Saddam Hussein, more than a third of Albertans continued to approve Canadian participation, versus only a tenth of Quebecers. More to the point, throughout the entire period covered, there never was a time when a majority of Quebecers wanted the country to go to war against Iraq, which contrasts sharply with opinion in the ROC by the end of March and early April 2003. Even though they might have been divided as to the merits of using force against Iraq, a majority of Canadians managed to swing around to the position that Ottawa's refusal to back the US and join the war constituted a strategic blunder. This reassessment would itself be revised during the summer of 2003, once it became apparent that bringing peace and stability to Iraq was not going to be as easy as toppling its erstwhile leader had been (Ipsos News Centre 2004). By contrast, Quebecers' near-unanimity regarding the wisdom of the war was hardly shaken by the overthrow of Hussein in April, with only one Quebecer in ten admitting that perhaps the combat had been justified, after all. This leads to the deduction that Canada's policy on the Iraq war, in the absence of Quebec, may well indeed have been different from the one adopted (Ipsos News Centre 2003a; Ekos 2003).

There was a clear and manifest divergence in the respective manners in which Quebecers and other Canadians perceived threat. An average gap of 24 points separated Quebecers from Albertans, while 15 points distanced them from the ROC minus Alberta. Albertans, meanwhile, were on average 9 points more supportive of Canadian participation in the Iraq war than elsewhere in the ROC. These gaps in threat-perception match the ones we discovered in the preceding section, in respect of the Afghan war. Thus, once again, we can postulate the existence of a Quebec distinctiveness on questions related to war and peace—a distinctiveness that stands out in highest relief when contrasted with attitudes in Alberta.

As we noted earlier, several analysts have argued that Quebecers' divergent attitudes are primarily a function of anti-Americanism (see Bow 2008, 341–59). We have already expressed our skepticism regarding this contention, because in so many other dimensions of Canada–US relations it has typically been said of Quebecers that they are different from the ROC in being more *pro*-American (see Bouchard 2008). Indeed, no less an observer than the US ambassador to Canada, Paul Cellucci, was quoted (Cornellier 2003, A1 and A10) to the effect that Washington understood Quebecers to be *pro*-American, and to have been extremely supportive in the campaign for the Canada–US

Free Trade Agreement. As well, Cellucci expressed understanding for a long-standing antiwar sentiment in the province, and he made a point of noting that in the embassy's reports to Washington, care was always taken to distinguish between antiwar attitudes and anti-American ones.

The ambassador's words were intended to be soothing, but there is no question that the level of hostility being expressed toward President George W. Bush vexed American officials in Ottawa, as elsewhere in the country. And, indeed, hostility there was, in Quebec more than in the ROC. In October 2004, for instance, some 82 percent of those surveyed (La Presse 2004, A6) confessed to having an unfavorable image of the president, as opposed to a "mere" 56 percent in the ROC. Moreover, while a majority of Quebecers did own up to feeling favorably disposed toward the American people, it was only a slim majority of 53 percent, contrasted with 79 percent of Canadians elsewhere with favorable images of Americans (Rodrigue 2005, A10; Parkin 2003, 5–7; Ipsos News Centre 2003b). During this same survey, 76 percent of Quebecers stated that their regard for the US had diminished, as opposed to 61 percent in the ROC registering this view (Rodrigue 2005, A10). Clearly, Quebecers (only 8 percent of whom said their image of the US had improved) were feeling more ill-disposed both toward the US government and the country writ large during the controversy over Iraq. But while it is certain that Quebecers had a hard time warming up to George W. Bush, they were not completely out of step with their fellow Canadians in this matter. One well-known public-opinion analyst, Michael Adams (Adams 2005, A21), reported that President Bush was the most despised president Canada had known since the days of James Madison—and he went on to note that the latter occupied the White House the last time Canadians and Americans had fought against each other, during the War of 1812!

This rough similarity in their reactions to George W. Bush should not, however, cause us to reject the hypothesis that there really *is* a Quebec distinctiveness, one that shows up first and foremost when it comes to threat-perception, and finds its fundamental source in differing national cultures. After all, it must be borne in mind that early in the Bush administration's first mandate, the choice was made to adopt a foreign policy that Quebecers adjudged to be both aggressive and militaristic, and this judgment can go a long way in accounting for their negative images of the president. For example, two months prior to the invasion of Iraq, 44 percent of Quebecers (compared with 34 percent of Canadians in the ROC) thought that the US represented the principal threat to global security—more than double the number of those who believed that al-Qaeda constituted that principal threat (see Ekos 2003). If this is so, then it is possible to deduce that because of their disquiet with what they took to be a profoundly bellicose Bush foreign policy, Quebecers easily convinced themselves that the US was a bigger obstacle to global security than al-Qaeda.

In other words, their worldview was stamped with an indelible anti-militarism that would have implications for how they came to assess the meaning of American foreign policy during a moment when that latter was demonstrating pronounced "Jacksonian"—some added, "neoconservative"—tendencies, manifesting themselves in an eagerness to employ military force in a unilateral manner (for this imagery, see Mead 1999). At a moment when America was reaffirming its military might, it is hardly surprising that a Quebec steeped in a "culture of peace" should have begun to look like a very anti-American place. But if it *was* anti-Americanism, it was the kind that takes

its inspiration from opposition to policies not people.⁵ Such policies would include, to take a current example, the controversy unleashed by Iran's efforts to enrich uranium, which most foreign observers believe can only be motivated by a desire to acquire nuclear weapons. In this respect, Quebecers, even more than Canadians in the ROC (by 56–54 percent), think that an Iranian bomb would be a very worrisome thing. Yet at the same time, only 35 percent of them would support Canadian participation in a military strike aimed at preventing an Iranian bomb, versus 54 percent of Albertans and 45 percent of those in the ROC minus Alberta, who would endorse Canadian involvement in such an initiative (Ipsos News Center 2012).

On the basis of what we have examined so far, it would certainly be easy to conclude that Canadian grand strategy in the absence of Quebec would indeed be very different from what it has been with Quebec as part of the federation. But this is only half of the story; we need to know more than simply what Quebecers happen to think about the use of force. We need also to know something about whether, and if so, how, their preferences have been reflected and transformed into policy. Accordingly, our article's next sections will deal with the question of Quebec's mooted "influence" over Canada's grand strategy, and will consist of three sets of related inquiries focused upon (1) the *direct* means through which Quebec might seek to attain such influence at the federal level and (2) the motivation of Ottawa to act in preservation of national unity. We elaborate on these matters below, starting with arguments about how Quebec might seek to gain influence directly at the federal level.

Operationalizing Quebec's "influence-attempts"⁶

During the interwar years, Quebecers' isolationist leanings tended to track closely those of Americans, thus it could be remarked, all things being equal, that Quebec's contribution to debates over Canadian grand strategy resulted in a rapprochement between Canadian and American strategic preferences (see Haglund 2000, 727–43). In more recent years, in light of the controversies we analyzed earlier regarding Afghanistan and Iraq, it would not be possible for anyone to make such a claim; instead, some have been prompted to observe that if only Quebec were not a part of Canada, relations between the latter and the US would not have been much as troubled as they turned out to be during the past decade or so. Such an observation must depend, however, on the demonstration that Quebec sought and *obtained* influence in the shaping of Canadian foreign policy, in the first instance by making its voice heard through its members of the federal parliament, and in particular the House of Commons. For nearly all the time during the period upon which we concentrate in this article, namely the years 2002–2012, the majority of Quebecers were represented in Ottawa by the Bloc Québécois (BQ), which made it its principal aim in the House to promote Quebec sovereignty. During this decade, it was able to fill between 38 and 51 of the 75 federal seats from the province, so that it always could claim to have garnered the majority of the province's ridings during nine of those years: from 2000 to 2004 it had 38 seats; from 2004 to 2006, 54; and from 2008 to 2011, 49.

The BQ staked out different positions on the two wars under examination here. On the Iraq war, it was categorically opposed, and in expressing his party's positions, Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe knew that the province's electorate was largely behind him. In

mid-February 2003, Duceppe declared that the Bloc would oppose Canadian participation in any unsanctioned (i.e., by the UN) war against Iraq, and he expressed his conviction that Saddam Hussein could be made to disarm through peaceful means. Besides, no one had yet proved that the Iraqi leader *had* WMD in quantities sufficient to justify a preventive strike. Therefore, he continued, it would be against international law for the war advocated by the Bush administration to take place without UN blessing. It would, in effect, be the first step on a slippery and dangerous slope. Duceppe was worried that, at this point in the crisis, there were too many ambiguities surrounding Canada's own position on the Iraq crisis, and he urged Prime Minister Chrétien to "categorically reject any Canadian participation in action against Iraq orchestrated by the American government outside of a UN framework" (Bloc Québécois 2003).

The sovereigntist leader hardly limited his exertions to speeches in the House; between January and March 2003 he participated in four antiwar demonstrations, including one on February 15 that brought 150,000 protesters into the streets of Montréal, in what was the largest such demonstration in the province's history. By comparison, antiwar demonstrations in other Canadian cities at the time were more modest, 12,000 marching in Edmonton, 10,000 in Toronto, and only 2,000 in Ottawa (Cauchy 2003, A1; Lachapelle 2003, 911–27). Continuing its antiwar mobilization efforts in the House, the BQ introduced a motion on February 10 demanding that Canada "consider the sending of troops to Iraq by the government only after the United Nations Security Council has passed a resolution explicitly authorizing a military intervention in Iraq" (House of Commons Debates 2003b, 3335). The motion was defeated by the Liberal government and the Conservative opposition, 195 to 54, with the New Democratic Party and four dissenting Liberals voting alongside the Bloc. In reacting to the vote, Duceppe let slip some anti-American verbiage, basically accusing those who voted against his motion of being cowards who were simply dancing to a tune played by an American piper (Buzzetti 2003, A16).

The Liberal government was indeed leaving the door open to possible Canadian participation in the war against Iraq, something that would almost certainly have transpired had France chosen to throw its support behind the US, even in the absence of a Security Council authorization (as had happened just a few years earlier, in the Kosovo war) (see Massie 2008a; Haglund 2005, 180). Lacking any green light from France, Prime Minister Chrétien announced on March 17 that Canada was refusing to take part in the US–UK invasion of Iraq. The announcement was applauded by the BQ, which nonetheless criticized the Liberals for permitting some 180 members of the CF who were deployed with American and British units to accompany their comrades into combat (Toupin 2003, A7). The lesson Duceppe (2004) drew from all of this was apparent: It was that in making Ottawa cognizant of Quebecers' near-universal condemnation of the war, the Bloc had "played a determining role in preventing Canadian participation."

In the case of the Afghan war, things were different, with the BQ taking much longer to mobilize opposition from within the province, signifying that the latter's "influence" (along with that of the party) would be a more difficult matter to detect (see Massie 2010; Massie, Boucher, and Roussel 2010, 259–75). Duceppe had backed the initial Canadian participation in combat against the Taliban, in the autumn of 2001. But when the Chrétien government responded favorably to the Bush administration's

request that Canada deploy troops to Kabul in February 2003, which would free up American forces for service in Iraq, the Bloc leader changed his tune. Now, the Afghan mission began to reek of duplicity, as he accused Ottawa of being hypocritical in refusing to do openly what it was ready to do through subterfuge, namely to support the US effort in Iraq by means of Afghanistan (House of Commons Debates 2003a, 2884). Even so, his rhetoric did not prevent Duceppe from supporting Canada's military engagement in that Central Asian country. For instance, he took the trouble, in June 2004, to remind everyone that his position had not changed one iota, and that neither he nor the Bloc had felt the slightest hesitation in approving a multilateral armed intervention, authorized by the UN and led by NATO, with the objective of flushing out the Islamist extremists and toppling the Taliban government that succored them (Duceppe 2004).

Even more to the point, and notwithstanding the drop in public support for the Afghan mission by the spring of 2006, the Bloc continued to express its belief in the merits of Canada's participation in the operation. Duceppe took pains to stress that "Afghanistan is not Iraq," because of the former mission's UN authorization, its clear anti-terrorist thrust, and its multidimensional nature (combining humanitarian, diplomatic, and military aspects). Because Afghanistan represented fertile soil for terrorism and insecurity, Duceppe (2007) claimed that a sovereign Quebec would have participated in the international efforts in that country. Thus, we suggest that even though a large and growing majority of Quebecers were becoming disenchanted with the mission, it hardly follows that their opposition was being registered in the House of Commons via the Bloc. For sure, Duceppe and his parliamentary colleagues understood that it was their duty to take into consideration public opinion, but there would always be times when serving the public good required going against that same public's wishes (see House of Commons Debate 2006, 1510). In other words, the national interest in combating terrorism, in Duceppe's judgment, trumped the party's obligation to represent Quebec's "specificity" in the federal parliament.

However, as the 2008 federal elections approached, the BQ executed an about-face, and began to serve as a direct vehicle for transmitting Quebecers' discontent with the Afghan mission to the federal level. It did this by voting against extending the combat operations until December 2011, for example on March 10, 2008 (House of Commons Debates 2008, 3840), in so doing underscoring that its position on this issue had evolved in total harmony with what Quebecers wanted, and daring the other federal parties to challenge them before the province's voters. This challenge to the contrary notwithstanding, the Bloc did not make much of an effort to mobilize that electorate on the Afghan question; indeed, the party's electoral program for 2008 did not even see fit to bring it up. The only war worth mentioning in that program was the one in Iraq, which gave the Bloc a chance to rake Stephen Harper over the coals for prowar statements he had made back in 2003, before becoming Prime Minister (Bloc Québécois 2008). In sharp contrast to 2008, though, was the Bloc's platform for the 2011 elections, which made explicit reference to Afghanistan, concluding that as Canada had already done its part in that troubled land, the time had come to its end combat role. Even the Harper government's decision to end that role by December 2011 (announced in the autumn of 2010) did not go far enough, as the Bloc pounced upon positions of both the government and the opposition Liberals for showing a willingness to keep Canadian soldiers in

Afghanistan in a training role until 2014. For its part, the Bloc insisted that Ottawa should respect the voice of Quebecers, and withdraw all Canadian military personnel well before 2014 (see Bloc Québécois 2011, 181). The Bloc was basing its position on recent polls showing a majority of Quebecers (some 55 percent) opposing the new training mission, at a time in December 2010 when majorities of Albertans, Ontarians, and British Columbians were supporting it (Angus Reid 2010).

So while it is true that after 2008 there would be some attempt made by the Bloc to mobilize Quebec opinion on the Afghan question, this paled in comparison with the much more energetic campaign against the Iraq war in 2003. Moreover, and notwithstanding the Bloc's evolving position on Afghanistan, the Harper government was able on two different occasions to get Liberal support for the combat phase of the Canadian deployment. Eventually, toward the end of 2010, the government was able to defuse the issue by switching the CF to the new role of training, and in a new part of the country (Kabul). So even if we accept that there might be some merit in the argument that the Bloc did, at least in part, influence the prime minister's thinking on Afghanistan, it remains the case that by the time the decision had been made to end the combat role of the CF, it reflected not only the preferences of a majority of Quebecers, but also of Canadians in general.

We conclude from this case that there is good reason to imagine that even a Canada shorn of Quebec would have ended up adopting the very same policy that the government of Canada did pursue on Afghanistan. Moreover, despite its stranglehold on most of the province's federal seats, the Bloc chose not to go to bat on behalf of the well-known Quebec attitudinal distinctiveness until sometime in 2008, after which it proved itself incapable of getting Ottawa to embrace its new position on the Afghan war. The Bloc, as discussed, wanted all Canadian troops withdrawn, and this, the government refused to consider doing. So unlike in the case of the Iraq war, in that of Afghanistan, Canadians' "differential threat perception" stemming from their ethnocultural fragmentation turned out not to matter very much.

The national unity file

The Bloc's inability to exercise any real influence over Canadian policy on Afghanistan owes much more to the absolute autonomy of the executive on matters pertaining to war and peace than it does to any shortcomings in the party's mobilization efforts (Massie 2013). Basically, the cabinet, over which the prime minister presides (at times with so much vigor as to disconcert fellow parliamentarians, not excluding a few with cabinet portfolios of their own), is solely responsible for deploying Canadian troops abroad. It is not obliged to seek, even less to obtain, parliamentary approval when exercising this responsibility. And while governments have been known to consult with parliament—almost always *after* the decision to use force has been taken—they have done so with an eye to buttressing the legitimacy of the decision, as well as to share responsibility for its consequences (Lagassé 2012, 157–80; Nossal 2010; Dewing and McDonald 2006).

Does the effective existence of a "friendly dictatorship" (Simpson 2001) on matters of high politics mean, though, that we must deem Quebec a priori to be incapable of influencing Canadian foreign policy in a manner consistent with its aforementioned

“specificities” regarding the perception of, and response to, threat? Not necessarily, and this for a few good reasons. First, the presence of a prime minister from Quebec, along with other members of cabinet from the province, certainly would seem to convey, de facto, a degree of sway over decision-making. This has been precisely what so riled the political scientist, Ted Morton, a decade ago, when he observed that “[n]ine of the past 10 federal elections have been won by a party with a Quebec leader. These Quebec prime ministers have consolidated all real power in the Montreal-dominated offices of the PMO and PCO.” As a result, he continued, the “once-proud Canadian military, historically an irritant in French–English relations, has been deliberately reduced to Boy Scout status. As the Iraqi war reminded us, Canadian foreign policy is set by public opinion in Quebec, which has meant abandoning our historical allies—the other great English-speaking democracies of the world” (Morton 2003, A20).

Morton is hardly the first to decry and decry a disproportionate Quebec influence over the decision to abstain from participation in the Iraq war. Nor is it just in English Canada that one encounters the claim of such influence (even if the normative judgment thereupon might differ). Guy Lachapelle agrees that Quebec did indeed factor into the Iraq decision-making, primarily because of the impact exercised by the province’s strongly antiwar public opinion upon federal leaders whose political base was in the province (Lachapelle 2003, 922; Cooper and Morton 2003, A16). The logic here was not that Prime Minister Chrétien feared a backlash against himself, for he had already announced he would be stepping down as federal Liberal leader (and therefore also as prime minister); it was that he was concerned not to do anything that might jeopardize the chances of the *provincial* Liberals in the upcoming Quebec election, scheduled for April 2003. Added to this was the worry about spoiling the *federal* Liberal brand among the province’s electorate, given that Quebec held almost a quarter of all the country’s federal ridings—some 75 out of 308, or 24 percent. This being the case, Quebec contained a bountiful harvest of votes, something any party aspiring to capture a majority in Ottawa would naturally want to tap into. And because of this, it is just as natural to assume that sentient political leaders would need to take into consideration preferences expressed through public opinion polls in the province. At least, this seemed to be the conventional wisdom until the most recent federal election, held in May 2011. That election overturned the conventional perspective, for in winning a majority with 166 seats, only five of which came from Quebec, Stephen Harper’s Conservatives showed that it was possible to gain or hold onto power in Ottawa without the support of Quebec, implying equally that one could go against public opinion there without incurring any major political damage. This generalization applied, with even more force, when it came to public opinion on foreign policy, given that so few federal elections in Canadian history have ever really turned on foreign-policy issues.

Notwithstanding, the argument of a disproportionate influence of the province’s public opinion in the shaping of Canadian policy would resurface in respect of the *Afghan* war, subsequent to the Conservatives coming to power with a minority in 2006 (Bercuson 2008, A23). At the very least, we can say that regarding the other war, in Iraq, it would not be easy to “prove” such influence being exercised upon, and reflected through, the Chrétien cabinet, whether for electoral or ideological reasons. For one thing, Jean Chrétien has never acknowledged any such rationales in explaining the decision he took to stay out of the Iraq war (Coulon 2004, 123–42; Chrétien 2007).

Even if he had, all that would have demonstrated is that he was listening to public opinion and using it to justify decisions that could have been motivated by an entirely different set of considerations. To really show that Quebec somehow exercised instrumental influence over federal policymaking, we would need access to archival sources. In the absence of such documentation, we can only say that verifying the hypothesis of Quebec's wielding outsized influence—and this by dint of leaders stemming from the province—must remain an impossible undertaking.

Moreover, as [Figure 2](#) shows, only in Alberta could a clear majority be found supporting Canadian participation in an invasion of Iraq that failed to receive the imprimatur of the UN Security Council, prior to March 17, 2003. This suggests that if there were an instrumental influence exercised by public opinion, then it was that expressed in the ROC outside of Alberta, rather than in Quebec, that made the difference. Only from this point of view does it make sense to claim, as does Eddie Goldenberg (2006, 297), that the “decision to stay out of the war ... averted a potential major national unity crisis.” This is so because if most of English Canada had wanted the country to enter a war that Quebec opposed, and if the government reacted solely to Quebec preferences, then there really *would* have been a national-unity crisis.

Goldenberg's comment, nonetheless, demonstrates how worries about national unity can easily become factored into analyses of decision-making on war and peace in Canada. The argument here, then, would be that the source of Quebec's “influence” must ultimately be located in the knowledge held by government officials that they must *always* strive to preserve harmony between Anglophone and Francophone Canadians, which entails taking into serious consideration the views of Quebecers. Since the latter only constitute a minority of the country's population (23 percent) and its electoral representation in the House of Commons (24 percent),⁷ it would seem to follow that giving them a relatively equal voice with the rest of the country must translate into their having, by definition, “disproportionate” influence. Added to this is the presumption that conceding such influence strengthens rather than weakens the national fabric, because it is understood that the preservation of national unity constitutes, *ipso facto*, a “vital” national interest, and has done so ever since 1867 (Granatstein 2005; Holloway 2006). In this perspective, forging special bonds between Canada and the French-speaking countries, especially France and other members of the Francophonie, particularly Haiti, can similarly be regarded as contributing to national unity, because such bonds create a counterbalance to the weight exercised by special relationships connecting Canada to the Anglo-American world (Gendron 2006; Massie 2009, 235–70). By the same token, it is held that adopting foreign policy roles dear to both of the country's linguistic groups (e.g., peacekeeping) can only strengthen national unity, in effect serving as icing on the national-unity cake (Thomsen and Hynek 2006; Massie and Roussel 2008).

Canada's diplomatic efforts, made at the height of the Iraq crisis in early 2003, to find some means of reconciling the positions of the US and UK, on the one hand, with that of France on the other, can be interpreted in this manner. These efforts can be regarded as having been inspired by a desire to generate harmony between Francophones and Anglophones—on *both* sides of the Atlantic. The fear was that any schism between France and the leading members of the Anglosphere would imperil national unity, hence Canadian efforts to eliminate such a rift could only redound to the defense of

the national interest. So much for the theory. What of the reality? Notwithstanding the abovementioned differences on the wisdom of Canada's participation in the Iraq war, it is extremely difficult to imagine that ethnocultural tensions associated with foreign policy in 2003 could ever have come close to matching the impact that similar divisions used to have so regularly, during the first half of the 20th century, when questions of war and peace really *could*, and did, mightily strain national unity. During those earlier years, Canada's foreign and security policy—its grand strategy, as we have been arguing here—recurringly reflected a struggle between the desire to aid Britain, if need be by deploying expeditionary forces to foreign battlefields, and the hope that such aid might not explode at home, by touching off crises such as those triggered over conscription during both world wars (Stacey 1992; MacFarlane 1999).

It is possible, though not very easy, to imagine something like those earlier national-unity crises recurring over matters related to foreign policy. Even if it could be maintained, as looked to be the case during the George W. Bush administration, that Quebeckers differed profoundly from other Canadians as regarded relations with the US, it remains that as a referent object for identity, the US can *never* match the emotional power that Britain once possessed, both to attract (*viz.*, the Anglophones) and to repel (the Francophones). Given the existence of such strong affective implications accompanying English–Canadians' "transatlantic collective identity" during the era of the world wars, it was inevitable that grand strategy would have—and would be seen to have—profound implications for national unity; for in the early decades of the 20th century, insofar as many of the country's Anglophones were concerned, Canada *was* Britain, and vice versa (Kohn 2004).

Not only this, but with respect to Canadians' attitudes toward the US, what strikes us is much less any gap between Quebeckers and English–Canadians regarding the George W. Bush administration, but rather the reverse: an agreement between the two linguistic communities (Alberta excepted) that there was much to worry about when thoughts turned to the Bush foreign policy. By 2006, for example, the opinion of Canadians in the ROC outside of Alberta was nearly as negative as that of Quebeckers, in the matter of assessing the administration's implications for global security (Gruda 2006, A2).

Conclusion

So does Quebec exercise too much influence over Canada's grand strategy? In trying to answer this question, we have first established that when it comes to the business of perceiving threat, there really is something different about the manner in which Quebeckers do things—different, to be sure, from Albertans' threat perception, but also from that in the ROC minus Alberta. This does not mean that the latter never resembles Quebec, for as we showed in the case of the Iraq war, there ended up being more or less agreement within the country as a whole that the decision to stay out of the conflict was, in the end, the right one. Still, our Afghan case study tends to corroborate the claim about Quebec's strategic specificity.

The real question is not so much whether Quebec differs from the ROC and from the latter minus Alberta, but whether the difference takes on operational significance for Canada's grand strategy, and for the quality of its relations with the US. If *all* that mattered in policymaking was public opinion, then a case might be made for the

importance of the difference. Public opinion, of course, does matter in any democracy (how could it not?), but it is far from the only determinant of strategy. In our article's second section, we sought to assess how the Quebec difference might get translated into policy outputs, directly in the first instance, subsequently more indirectly. First, we looked at how federal politicians from the province, both in the BQ and the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien, might be said to have affected policymaking so as to reflect, and give advantage to, interests within the province. Here we found, not surprisingly, that the Bloc's "influence" was hard to detect, but that, of course, of the cabinet of Jean Chrétien was a horse of a different color altogether. Obviously, the cabinet had to matter in a way the Bloc did *not*. But did its decision-making accord "undue" weight to Quebec preferences? Here, we basically opted out of providing a definitive answer, arguing that only the archives can possibly tell us whether federal decision-making was importantly influenced by perceptions of the impact in Quebec of policy choices that the province would deem to have been ill-advised.

This in turn led us to our investigation of a second possible vector of influence: The worry that failure to appease Quebec might fuel dangerous tensions for national unity. We do not take this concern lightly, as in the past it was obvious how grand strategy could and did serve as a wedge separating the two "founding peoples" of Canada, more or less on linguistic grounds. But we argued that, today, whatever national-unity implications might be associated with strategic decision-making, they pale in comparison with those of the past. Thus, we ended by doubting that the source of Quebec's mooted "influence" could truly be found here.

In the final analysis, perhaps the most relevant conclusion one can draw regarding the worries about Quebec's mooted "influence" is not that they lack a basis in fact—it is rather that those voicing the worries choose not to appreciate that in a country that has been bicultural and binational before it has been anything else, Canadian grand strategy has necessarily accommodated itself to cultural and linguistic realities associated with life in a part of the world that is part both of an "Anglosphere" and a "Francosphere."

Notes

1. We follow here the sense of the term articulated by Kennedy (1991, 5), who writes that "the crux of grand strategy lies therefore in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (that is, in wartime *and* peacetime) best interests." Also see, for a particular application to Canada, Doran and Pratt (2012, 25–44).
2. On Canadian cultural diversity, see Kymlicka (2003, 12). On its implications for Canadian foreign policy, see Holmes (1968), Welsh (2004, 152), and Resnick (2005).
3. The literature on this point is vast. See, for instance, Rioux (2005), Roussel and Boucher (2008, 165–87), Massie (2008b, 19–48), Haglund and Massie (2009, 398–417), and Massie and Boucher (2013).
4. An invaluable guide for such qualifications is Katzenstein and Keohane (2007).
5. This is the kind of oppositional distinction that Hollander (2005) sought to express.
6. Our use of the concept, "influence-attempt," is derived from Baldwin (1971, 471–86).
7. Quebec's electoral representation in the House of Commons has been reduced to 23 percent in 2015.

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Notes on contributors

David G. Haglund is a professor of Political Studies at Queen's University (Kingston, Ontario). His research focuses on transatlantic security, and on Canadian and American international security policy. His most recent book, titled *Ethnic Diasporas and the Canada–US Security Community: From the Civil War to Today*, was published in 2015.

Justin Massie is professor of political science at the University of Quebec in Montreal and Senior Fellow at the Centre interuniversitaire de recherche sur les relations internationales du Canada et du Québec (CIRRIQ). His research interests include foreign policy analysis, burdensharing, and contemporary peace operations.

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